

**Minutes of the Special Meeting  
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Monday, September 26, 2016  
5:05 p.m. – 7:05 p.m.**

**Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

**Paul Sagan**, Chair, Cambridge

**Katherine Craven**, Brookline

**Ed Doherty**, Boston

**Margaret McKenna**, Boston

**Nathan Moore**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Scituate

**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke

**James Peyser**, Secretary of Education

**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

**Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:**

**Roland Fryer**, Cambridge

**James Morton**, Vice-Chair, Boston

**Pendred Noyce**, Boston

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m. and welcomed members. Commissioner Chester said the September meeting is typically reserved for the opportunity to review and discuss student results from the prior year and school and district accountability results. He said districts administered either PARCC or MCAS in 2016. He introduced Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston, Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin, Associate Commissioner Michol Stapel, and Bob Lee, chief assessment analyst.

The Commissioner reminded the Board that districts that gave MCAS in 2015 were allowed to choose whether to administer MCAS or PARCC in spring 2016 for grades 3-8 English Language Arts and mathematics. Districts that administered PARCC in 2015 were asked to continue doing so in 2016, selecting either the computer-based or paper-based version of the assessment.

Ms. Stapel said in 2015, the percentage of districts choosing MCAS and PARCC was roughly even in terms of numbers and demographics. She said in spring 2016, approximately 72% of students took PARCC tests and the remaining 28% took MCAS tests. Ms. Stapel said the even split in 2015 allowed the Department to create a representative sample of students from each group as a basis for statewide comparisons, but this year's uneven makeup does not allow the Department to create a representative sample and therefore aggregate results are unavailable at the state level for grades 3-8 in English Language Arts and mathematics.

Mr. Lee said the state-wide assessment participation rates are very high. He said in 2016, 60 percent of districts administered the paper-based version of the PARCC assessment, compared to 40 percent in 2015. He said in the Commissioner's districts, 91 percent administered PARCC, and in small and medium-sized urban districts, 85 percent administered PARCC. Mr. Lee said the PARCC English Language Arts results showed a 1.1 percent increase in students who were proficient or met expectations compared to 2015; in mathematics there was a 3.8 percent

increase. Mr. Lee said grade 10 MCAS English Language Arts results saw no change (91% proficient or higher), mathematics saw a one point decrease (78 % proficient or higher), and Science and Technology/Engineering saw a one point increase (73% proficient or higher). He reviewed changes in PARCC and MCAS school proficiency rates by student groups, and discussed students' experience with new PARCC items on the MCAS assessment.

Katherine Craven arrived at 5:40 p.m.

In response to Secretary Peyser's question, Mr. Lee said across the PARCC consortium, Massachusetts had the highest results last year. Commissioner Chester cautioned against over-interpreting the data from only two years. In response to Ms. McKenna's question, Mr. Lee said students in the early grades saw a four point increase in mathematics on PARCC, which seems significant given that about 750 schools, largely urban, administered PARCC. In response to Mr. Moriarty's question, Mr. Lee said the assessment is a mix of challenging items and simpler ones. In response to Chair Sagan's question, Ms. Stapel said including PARCC items on the MCAS test this year exposed students to different item types, and in general students did quite well given that the items were challenging.

Commissioner Chester said students in grades four and eight will experience the computer-based assessment this spring. He said students need access and exposure to technology and computer-based testing to become more comfortable. He added that students report the computer-based assessment is more engaging. The Commissioner noted that the National Assessment of Educational Progress will be administered online this year.

Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston introduced the update on 2016 district and school accountability determinations, exit determinations, next steps for Level 4 schools, and assessment and accountability results for Level 5 districts and schools. He said the Level 5 school and district receivers will report to the Board throughout the school year; tonight the Board will hear from Matt Spengler of Blueprint, the receiver for the Dever School in Boston.

Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin reviewed the current accountability and assistance system under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act flexibility waiver, and the school classification system (Levels 1-5). He said in 2016, schools and districts that administered PARCC (ELA and mathematics grades 3-8) were held harmless for accountability levels per the Board's direction, and the cumulative progress and performance index (PPI) was calculated with and without the 2015 PPI to ensure that the higher value was used. He said the hold harmless provision does not apply to high schools, MCAS-only schools or districts, schools with persistently low graduation rates, or schools and districts with low or very low assessment participation. He said participation rates were also calculated using a two-year participation average, using the higher rate for decisions on accountability level. Mr. Curtin said 117 schools were held harmless from a lower level in 2016. He congratulated the 49 schools named Commendation Schools for high achievement, high growth, and gap narrowing.

In response to Ms. Craven's question regarding participation, Mr. Curtin said if a school has less than 95 percent participation on assessments for over two years, it would be held accountable. He noted that a two-year participation average was calculated, and the higher rate was used to benefit schools during a transition period. In response to Ms. Stewart's question, Mr. Curtin said the Department is phasing in the reduction in the minimum group size to 20.

Mr. Johnston gave an overview of the seven cohorts of Level 4 schools. He said between 2013 and 2015, 22 schools exited Level 4 to Levels 1, 2, or 3. He said in 2016, three Level 4 schools

are exiting to Levels 1, 2, or 3: Spark Academy Middle School (Lawrence), Bentley Academy Charter School (Salem), and William DeBerry Elementary School (Springfield). Mr. Johnston said the 11 Level 4 schools remaining are engaged with in-district receivers, supported by a turnaround partner, or located within a Level 5 district. He said the Mattahunt Elementary School (Boston) and the High School of Commerce (Springfield) are currently under review by the Commissioner, and Brighton High School and Excel High School (Boston), and the Mary Fonseca Elementary School (Fall River) have been placed in Level 4 due to lack of progress or declining results for multiple years. He reviewed the assessment data for the four Level 5 schools.

Ventura Rodriguez, director of the Office of Strategic Transformation, updated the Board on back-to-school activities in the Level 5 districts. He said this summer Southbridge Receiver Huizenga focused on the middle school and high school, school culture and climate, and building relationships with students and families to ensure a positive start to the school year. He said professional development for educators focused on math curriculum, common assessments, and technology. Receiver Huizenga will present a more detailed report to the Board in October.

Executive Director Matt Spengler of Blueprint, the receiver for the Dever School, addressed the Board. He said two years into receivership, the school's PARCC assessment results are unacceptable, and Blueprint takes full responsibility. He said there is a new principal in place and he is overseeing the restructuring of the school's leadership team and student supports. Mr. Spengler said to address discipline issues at the school, staff have participated in Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support training. He said he has been at the Dever almost every day. He said the school has added instructional deans, hired five new teachers and set up new teacher teams, home visits and parental outreach have improved, breakfast in the classroom has been instituted, and mathematics fellows are working with grade four and five students.

Commissioner Chester said he is in frequent contact with Mr. Spengler regarding the school, and the Commissioner has made clear he will look at other options if the school does not improve in the coming year. Ms. Craven noted the geographic challenges of the location of Dever, as well as the impending facilities review by the city and school committee. Ms. McKenna said she is encouraged to hear that a former Boston Public Schools staff member is now helping the school to navigate BPS procedures, and she encouraged Blueprint to draw on partners for assistance. She said she hopes to see progress very soon. Chair Sagan thanked the Commissioner and presenters for the updates.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 7:05 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mitchell D. Chester  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
and Secretary to the Board